DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 330 RC 020 051

AUTHOR Smith, Cynthia; Morgan, Robert L.
TITLE Awareness of Deaf Sign Language and Gang Signs.
PUB DATE Mar 95
NOTE 8p.; In: Reaching to the Future: Boldly Facing Challenges in Rural Communities. Conference Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (Las Vegas, Nevada, March 15-18, 1995); see RC 020 016.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reference Materials - Vocabularies/Classifications/Dictionaries (134)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Sign Language; *Deafness; Disabilities; Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Juvenile Gangs; *Nonverbal Communication; *Rural Areas; *Victims of Crime; Violence

ABSTRACT

There have been increasing incidents of innocent people who use American Sign Language (ASL) or another form of sign language being victimized by gang violence due to misinterpretation of ASL hand formations. ASL is familiar to learners with a variety of disabilities, particularly those in the deaf community. The problem is that gang members have invented their own hand shapes and signs that closely resemble ASL. This is a critical consideration when teaching students with disabilities sign language. These signs, which are essential for conversation, can be dangerous in some communities, including rural areas that have seen an increase in gang activity. Professionals in rural areas need to inform students on how to avoid conflict with gang members. First, students need to find out and then avoid gang colors, symbols, and styles of clothing. Secondly, students need to be aware of how to handle a dangerous situation in gang territory. For example, an individual may accidentally give a hand signal that offends a gang member. The individual needs to politely explain that sign language is how they communicate and that no offense was meant. Finally, one should avoid any interactions with gang members. An individual's behavior or attitude may be viewed as disrespectful if he or she refuses to complete a request by a gang member in authority. A table that compares examples of ASL terms and hand formations with gang signs and hand formation is attached. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANE MONTGOMERY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 381 330

Cynthia Smith
Robert L. Morgan
Chadron State College
Chadron, NE

AWARENESS OF DEAF SIGN LANGUAGE AND GANG SIGNS

"Deaf Girl Shot for Signing" the headline may read. This is not an unreasonable consideration. Murders similar to this have been documented both in California and Florida, and many other incidents involving injury may go unreported (Nebraska Commission for the Hearing Impaired, 1994). These innocent people who use American Sign Language (ASL) or another form of sign language can be and are being victimized by gang violence.

ASL, a common method of signing, is familiar to learners with a variety of disabilities, particularly those in the deaf community. Such persons may acquire language by using ASL and use it as their primary means of communication. Others may utilize ASL or similar systems to enhance language development or expression (Kriegsmann, Gallaher, & Meyers, 1982). Individuals who use ASL or another sign system may be unwittingly victimized by gangs for no apparent reason (Johnson, 1993).

This happens as gang members in clans with familiar sounding names, such as Crips, Bloods, invent their own hand shapes and signs. According to Street Beat (Denver Police Department, 1993), this language is a boding factor. For instance, the sign for Vice Lords involves extending the thumb, index, and middle fingers while flexing the third and little fingers into the palm (Gangs LA Style, 1991) - which is the same sign for "3" in ASL. This sign becomes an identifying and unifying symbol among gang members (Ford, L., & Albert, B., 1990). Gangs create and utilize words and phrases that are unique to its local subculture (Shot for sign language? 1994). Gang language involves a mixture of hand shapes and signs and the primary spoken language of the members.

Most gang signs parallel ASL signs (please refer to the attached chart for examples). This is a critical consideration when teaching learners with disabilities sign language. When in the community or on the school grounds, they may be preyed upon by gang members. Gang sign language

CE 020051

has been seen in and around schools (Ford, L., & Albert, B., 1990). An additional problem for persons with hearing impairments is the use of "CUZ" for "because" while communicating on the Telephone Device Decoder (I.e., TDD/TTY). Gang members typically complete their sentences by using "Blood" or "Cuz."

People in rural areas often feel insulated from many of these problems. Yet, sign language is used by people in the hearing and deaf communities throughout the United States. These signs, essential for conversation, can be dangerous in some communities, including those in rural areas. Urban gangs are recruiting new gang members in rural communities, often without the residents' awareness. These communities do not comprehend how gang problems can arise in their own communities. Sharp (1994) noted active gang members in rural communities have been seen at some community locations where the members can meet without any transportation difficulty.

Professionals in rural areas should inform their students on how to avoid conflict with gang members. Johnson (1993) provided several guidelines. The first is to find out and then avoid gang colors, symbols, and style of clothing. For instance, the Disciples and Crips will wear blue and black. Bloods prefer red. Sports symbols also provide an indication of gang affiliation. Crips wear Los Angeles Dodgers and British Knights clothing. The Vice Lords wear clothing with New Orleans Saints, University of Colorado, Pittsburgh Pirates, and L.A. Kings symbols. Finally, gang members wear clothes off one shoulder or another. Disciples wear clothes off the right shoulder while the Bloods wear theirs to the left. Hispanic gangs typically wear baggy pants and tank tops or T-shirts.

The second is to be aware of how to handle a dangerous situation in gang territory. For example, an individual may accidentally give a hand signal that offends a gang member while innocently signing. The individual should politely say he or she was just communicating with another or carry some means of stating that sign language is the sole means of communication. Johnson (1993) reported that gang members may not lash out if given deference and respectful politeness.

Finally, one should learn to recognize and avoid any interactions with gang members. An individual's behavior or attitude may be viewed as disrespectful if he or she refuses to complete a request by a gang member

in authority. Gang members may also verbally abuse an innocent person for no reason (Denver Police Department, 1993).

References

Denver Police Department. (1993). Street beat. Denver, CO: Denver Police Department.

Dickinson, S., & Graham, M.P. (1993, February). Relay ambassador program training. Symposium conducted at Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, Greeley, CO.

Ford, L., & Albert, B. (1990, October 21). Our gangs. Indianapolis Star, pp F1+.

Gangs LA Style. (1991). Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office.

Johnson, D. (1993). This thing called gangs (2nd ed.). Topeka, KS: Lone Tree Publishing Company.

Kriegsman, E., Gallaher, J.C., & Meyers. (1982). Sign programs with nonverbal hearing children. Exceptional Children, 49, 436-445.

Nebraska Commission for the Hearing Impaired. (1994, Spring). Nebraska Commission for the Hearing Impaired Newsletter, 8, 2.

Sharp, A.G. (1994, June). Does anyone know were the gang members are? Law and Order, 42, 54, 63-66.

Shot for sign language? (1994, March-April). World Around You, 11.

Sternberg, M.L.A. (1987). American sign language dictionary. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Example American Sign Language Terms	Example American Sign Language Formations*	Gang Sign	Gang Sign Formations
"Y," yellow, me too	yellow - "Y" hand shakes slightly, pivoted at the wrist	"Primo" sign, Neighborhood Bloods	thumb and little finger are extended, middle three fingers are flexed into the palm
incomplete sign for cigarette, mock,	cigarette - the index and little fingers of the right hand, palm facing down, are placed upon the left index finger, so that the right index finger rests on the knuckle of the left index finger and the right little finger rests on the tip of the left index finger	Brims - a Bloods group	the index and little fingers of the hand are extended, the middle three fingers are flexed into the palm
I love you, incomplete sign for airplane, fly, airport	I love you - "I," "L," and "Y" are combined (thumb, index, and little finger are extended; middle and third fingers are flexed into the palm); palm is directed forward	Blackstone or Brim Bloods	thumb, index, and little finger are extended; middle and third fingers are flexed into the palm; palm is facing left (Blackstone); index and little fingers are pointed down (Brim Bloods)

*From AMERICA SIGN LANGUAGE DICTIONARY
by Martin L. A. Sternberg
HaperCollins Publishers
Used by permission

"L," shoot	shoot - the right "L" hand is pointed forward, palm facing left; the right thumb is then moved down, as in the movement of the pistol's hammer	Denver Lane Bloods	the right "L" hand is pointed forward, palm facing left; the right thumb is extended
"P" or "K," purple, principal, and principle	principal - the down turned, right "P hand is swung from right to left over the back of the prone left hand	Avalon Gangster Crips	an inverted ASL "K," or ASL "P"
"2" or "V," dance, other incomplete signs which include "V"	dance - the down turned index and middle fingers of the right "V" hand swing rhythmically back and forth over the upturned left palm	Playboy Gangster Crips	ASL "2" or "V"
through	through - the open right hand is pushed between either the middle and index or the middle and third fingers of the open left hand	Venice Gangster Bloods, Van Ness Gangster Bloods	the thumb is flexed into the palm, the remaining fingers are extended, middle and third fingers held apart
"V" or "2," arithmetic	arithmetic - the "V" hands, palms facing the body, alternately cross and separate, several times	Villains Bloods	ASL "V" or "2"

"F" and "9," member, family, find, appoint, and count	family - the thumb and index fingers of both "F" hands are in contact, palms facing; the hands swing open and around, coming together again at their little finger edges, palms now facing the body	Pirus Bloods	an inverted ASL "F" or "9"
"3," third, awkward, devil	awkward - the "3" hands, palms down, move alternately up and down before the body	Vice Lords	ASL "3"
earth, globe, beef, small	small - the extended right thumb and index finger are held slightly spread; they are then moved slowly toward each other until they almost touch	Crips	the extended right thumb and index finger are held slightly spread; the remaining fingers are flexed into the palm
balance, salt, name, happen	name - the right "H" hand, palm facing left, is brought down on the left "H" hand, palm facing right	Mafia Crips	the right "H" hand, palm facing down is brought parallel to the left "H" hand, palm facing down

another, other, ten, girl, tomorrow	another - the right "A" hand, thumb up is pivoted from the wrist and swung over to the right, so that the thumb now points to the right	Bishop	ASL "A" with thumb pointing up
"L," library, license	library - the right "L" hand, palm out, describes a small clockwise circle	Varrio La Loma	the right hand forms an "L" with the back of the hand facing the signer; the right hand forms an "L" with the palm facing the signer
"L," library, license	license - the "L" hands, palms out, touch at the thumb tips several times	Mafia Crips	the "L" hands, palms in, touch at the thumb tips
class, club, gang, company	gang - both "C" hands, palms facing, are held a few inches apart at chest height; they are swung around in unison so that the palms now face the body	Compton Crips	both hands form a "C" fingers spread apart, similar to a claw, with the palms facing each other
to	to - the extended right index finger moves forward slowly and comes to rest on the tip of the extended, upturned left index finger	Tortilla Flats	the extended right index finger is placed perpendicular on the extended and upturned left index finger